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ABSTRACT

The progress and problems of five Spanish-speaking fourth graders who have learned to read only in English are traced. An attempt is made to ascertain the relationship between oral fluency in Spanish and English and reading ability in English, the effects of dialect-based miscues on reading comprehension, and the types of reading strategies these students employ. Measurement tools used were the Bilingual Inventory of Natural Language and the Reading Miscue Inventory. The results of these are tabulated, and explained in detail with examples. Results of the study show a high degree of correlation between oral fluency in Spanish and English, and reading ability in English. Dialect-based miscues did not hamper reading comprehension: the students did not demonstrate a need to have the printed word make sense. However, the ESL teacher is mandated to stress the centrality of meaning in the reading process. (PMJ)

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THE RISKS OF INITIAL READING INSTRUCTION IN AN IMMERSION ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE SITUATION

A Paper

Presented to

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THE RISKS OF INITIAL READING INSTRUCTION IN AN IMMERSION ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE SITUATION

Educators who have dealt with or observed non-English-speaking students who are native Spanish-speakers in a "sink-or-swim" situation (i.e., total immersion in an English reading program with little or no support given in Spanish) will recognize that some students do indeed learn to swim. However, there are a number of students who sink--perhaps not at first, but eventually--and/or who decide at one point or another that swimming is just too difficult and who get out of the pool. The last group--the nonswimmers--refers, of course, to the high dropout rate of Mexican-American students, most of whom found themselves in a sink-or-swim situation due to the lack of bilingual programs at the time that they were beginning their schooling in the United States (U.S. Commission of Civil Rights, 1971). The advent and increase of bilingual education programs is lowering the number of non-English speakers who must try to cope with all-English instruction, but there still remains the problem of the intermediate or upper-grade students who entered school as total Spanish-speakers before a full bilingual program was implemented in their school, and who are now in the process

of "sinking." The problem is compounded by the fact that, in many cases, these students' abilities in Spanish have deteriorated to the point that they would not benefit greatly from instruction in Spanish, either; that is, they are now unable to speak fluently or comprehend (for purposes of content area instruction) either standard Spanish or standard English

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

This paper is to report on several native Spanish-speaking students who have been the recipients of reading instruction solely in English. The researcher felt it would be useful to concentrate on five students who are not doing well in English reading and try to discover what some of their successes and failures in reading have been.

Questions Raised

It was hoped that the study would yield answers to the following questions:

1. What is the relationship between the students' oral fluency in Spanish, oral fluency in English, and reading ability in English?
2. When dialect-based miscues occur (i.e., miscues which are deviations from the printed text in terms of pronunciation and/or morphological, vocabulary, or grammatical variations which are acceptable within the readers' dialect) do they hamper the students' reading comprehension?

3. What types of reading strategies do these students use in English reading?

PROCEDURE

Five students were selected and tested and the results of those tests were analyzed.

Selection of Subjects

Beginning fourth-graders were chosen so that the results of this study could be compared with those of a more extensive study conducted with second-semester third graders, by Dr. Rosalinda Barrera. (A summary of the results of this study is included in the latter portion of this report.)

Five subjects were selected because they satisfied the following criteria:

1. Beginning 4th-graders (2nd week of school, 7-78).
2. Native speakers of Spanish who entered Kindergarten speaking very little or no English.
3. In grades K through 3, had received reading instruction only in English.
4. Were reading below grade level in English at the time of testing.

With the assistance of the teachers and the auxiliary and office staff, plus the information available in the cumulative folders, the researcher was able to find thirteen students who fit the first three categories. Of these thirteen possible subjects, there were only three who were eliminated because they were reading at, or slightly

above grade level in English. Of the remaining ten, three boys and two girls were chosen who were available for testing.

Description Of Subjects

This section contains a description of each of the five subjects, including their language history (inasmuch as this was available) and report card grades.

Please note: In referring to the subjects, ficticious names have been used throughout.

Concha: Concha's Kindergarten teacher remembered her as speaking very little English upon entering school. According to Concha, she still understood "only a little bit" of what the teachers were saying by the end of that school year. She felt that in 1st grade she started understanding most of what the teachers said. Concha said she liked speaking English better than Spanish, "'cause hardly people don't talk in Spanish," and reported that speaking English was "easy, a little" for her now. She speaks Spanish at home and on the playground, and English "sometimes" in class and with her brother and sister.

Concha's past report cards indicated that her reading had gone from "Very Good" in 1st grade, to "Needs Improvement" by the end of 2nd grade. Her citizenship grades also went from VG and Excellent, to Satisfactory.

It was noted that she was given a "social promotion" to 3rd grade. By the end of 3rd grade, her reading was S, and her citizenship had improved to MB. Concha has never received better than a grade of S for oral language (English).

Concha said she felt "good" about reading the RMI story, but that it was "a little bit hard." (She demonstrated only ineffective/some effective use of reading strategies when reading a 1st-grade-second-semester level selection, which is the least difficult of the RMI stories.)

The fact that Concha performed so poorly on the RMI is perhaps not too surprising in light of the fact that it was administered during her second week of school after a ten-week absence (six weeks missed at the end of the '77-'78 school year, plus the four-week summer break), in addition to the fact that her 3rd grade teacher indicated that she was experiencing severe reading difficulties prior to her absence.

Eduardo: According to Eduardo's Kindergarten teacher, he had limited abilities in English when he entered Kindergarten, though he had previously attended preschool in English. Eduardo remembered that he understood "part" of what the teacher said at the beginning of Kindergarten, but thought he understood most of it by the middle of the year. He reported that he now understands all of what the teacher says.

Eduardo received scores of VG and Excellent in reading in the 1st grade, which went down to S and NI in 2nd grade. It was noted that he "will have to listen well and work hard." In 3rd grade he again received grades of VG for reading. For oral language, he received scores of VG in 1st and 3rd grades, and S in 2nd grade. His citizenship grades went from roughly half VG's and half S's in first grade, to half S's and half NI's in 3rd grade.

Marta: Marta attended Kindergarten in another district where on the Test of Basic Experiences she scored 19 percent in Spanish and 2 percent in English on the Language section, and 38 percent in Spanish and 9 percent in English on the Math section. Marta's 1st grade teacher (at her current school) remembered her as not knowing any English at all upon entering. Marta felt she understood a few things at the beginning of Kindergarten; that in 1st grade she understood some, but not all; and that in 2nd and 3rd grade she understood almost all, or all of what the teachers said.

In 1st grade, Marta received grades of E and VG in reading, which dropped to S's by mid-2nd grade, and were back up to VG in 3rd grade. Her oral language scores also went from VG (1st grade) to S (2nd grade) and back up to

VG (3rd grade). Marta's citizenship scores, similarly, went from all E's to all S's, then to half E's and half VG's.

Raúl: Raúl's Kindergarten teacher remembered him as beginning Kindergarten with limited knowledge of English. Raúl said of his Kindergarten experiences, "I didn't know English, and then my teacher started teaching me English," and admitted that it had been scary. He said that, though he didn't understand anything at the beginning of the school year, he did understand some things by the end. He reported that by 2nd and 3rd grades, he understood "all" of what his teachers said in English.

Raúl's reading grades were E and VG in 1st grade, and S's throughout 2nd and 3rd grades. His oral language grades were almost identical, and his citizenship grades were largely MG's in 1st grade, all S's in 2nd grade, and almost all S's in 3rd grade.

Roberto: Roberto's Kindergarten teacher remembered him as a non-English speaker at the beginning of that year. According to Roberto, he entered school knowing "a little bit" of English; but by the end of the year, he still didn't understand much. He said that in 1st grade he understood "a little bit more;" in 2nd grade, he understood some things, but not too much; and in 3rd grade he understood pretty much everything.

Roberto's report cards from 1st through mid-3rd grades were unavailable. In the mid and latter part of 3rd grade, Roberto received reading grades of NI and S, respectively. His oral language grades were S's, and most citizenship grades were S's. Early in 3rd grade, Roberto was referred to the speech therapist. He was diagnosed as having a frontal lisp, needing auditory discrimination skills, and making inconsistent ommissions. At the end of 3rd grade, the decision was made to place Roberto in the Spanish component of the bilingual program in 4th grade, where he would receive reading instruction in Spanish and thereby hopefully meet with greater academic success. He was returned to English reading when it became evident that his Spanish was not strong enough to support reading instruction in that language.

Tests Administered

In order to seek the answers to the questions proposed earlier, the researcher chose the Bilingual Inventory of Natural Language (Herbert, 1974) to measure the students' oral abilities in both Spanish and English, and the Reading Miscue Inventory (Goodman and Burke, 1972) to evaluate their reading ability in English and their use of various reading strategies. Both tests were administered as per instructions in the manuals. Checking the students' recent reading test scores helped to

determine which RMI story would be most appropriate for each subject.

RESULTS

The results of the BINL and RMI tests are shown in the following Tables and text.

Table 1

BINL RESULTS*

Subject	Spanish		English		Degree of Proficiency		
	Average Sentence Length in Words	Complexity Level	Average Sentence Length in Words	Complexity Level	Limited Eng. Spkr.	Fluent Eng. Spkr.	Proficient Eng. Spkr.
Concha	6.6	52.1	12.1	104.2			X
Eduardo	7.3	58.6	10.7	91.7		X	
Marta	7.4	58.3	13.2	96.0		X	
Raúl	8.3	66.6	11.9	102.1			X
Roberto	5.7	44.9	8.4	65.4	X		

*Based on a 10-sentence sample from each subject in each language.

It should be noted, however, that the BINL test does not at the present time take into account grammatical correctness. To provide the reader with a more complete description of the subjects' oral language abilities, the grammatically incorrect sentences produced are shown below, plus those sentences which included the mixing of languages.

Concha

English: The bus, I think he's going.
Then the bus puts his lights on.

Spanish: Andan sailing en un barco con snow y agua.

Eduardo

English: I don't know what those hat called.

Spanish: Están afuera de un barn.
Los patos de la vaca están cafeses y blancas.

Marta

English: Her sister told him to don't get the flowers.

Spanish: None.

Raul

English: It's on the state of Japan.
But three lazy kids ain't doing nothing.
They [are] just staring at the sun.

Spanish: Estaba un nino que estaba jalando los pelos a la vaca.
Si [se] lo dió cuenta, el niño lo agarrara.

Roberto

English: There's some grass, a man with shorts, and he's descalzo.

Spanish: Hay un stop sign.
Los ninos están cruzando el calle.
El sign dice stop.
Van a ir al escuela.
Van a ir a parkas o a casa.

RMI RESULTS

Each subject's oral reading and retelling of an RMI story was analyzed with regard to the following:

1. Reader's use of reading strategies,
2. Comprehension pattern,
3. Sound/graphic relationships,
4. Grammatical relationships, and
5. Dialect-based miscues.

Table 2

READER'S USE OF READING STRATEGIES

Subject	Grade Level of RMI Story Read	Highly Effective	Moderately Effective	Some Effective	Ineffective
Concha	1[2]			X	X
Eduardo	3			X	
Marta	3		X		
Raúl	3		X		
Roberto	2			X	X

Table 3

COMPREHENSION PATTERN

Subject	% No Loss	% Partial Loss	% Loss	Retelling Score*
Concha	28	0	72	4
Eduardo	32	12	56	47.5
Marta	48	24	28	66
Raúl	40	20	40	68
Roberto	16	4	80	21

*Points out of 100 possible.

Table 4

SOUND/GRAPHIC RELATIONSHIPS

	Similarity of Miscue to Printed Text:					
	Graphic			Sound		
Subject	High	Some	None	High	Some	None
Concha	48	48	5	43	43	14
Eduardo	71	14	14	48	19	33
Marta	56	33	11	50	17	33
Raúl	50	32	18	50	23	27
Roberto	96	0	4	60	36	4

Table 5

GRAMMATICAL RELATIONSHIPS

	Function			Relationships			
Subject	% Identical	% Indeterminate	% Different	% Strength	% Partial Strength	% Weakness	% Overcorrection
Concha	52	5	43	24	32	44	0
Eduardo	38	5	57	24	8	64	4
Marta	39	0	61	48	0	44	8
Raúl	59	5	39	38	8	36	20
Roberto	32	8	60	6	16	68	0

Dialect-Based Miscues

Concha made relatively few dialect-based miscues, but it should be kept in mind that the length of her reading selection was about one-fourth that of the other students'. Her dialect-based miscues fell into the following categories:

1. Final /d/-→/t/ (de-voicing) (said-→"set"); did only once.
2. Simplification of final consonant clusters (e.g., and-→"an"); did it four times, but did not do it four other times. Note: the modification of jumped-→"jump" and stopped-→"stop" (each modified once) can also be classified as an omission of the past tense morpheme.
3. Modification of verbs (other than those described above) (saw-→"sawed" and came-→"come").

It was found that the relatively few dialect-based miscues that Eduardo did make, fell into the following categories:

1. Vowel changes (full-→"fool") Note: three times he did change o͝o to o͞o, but ten times he did not; no other instances of vowel change.
2. Simplification of final consonant clusters (e.g., last-→"lass") Note: 21 times he did simplify final consonant clusters, 60 times he did not.
   Additional Note: the modification of moved-→"move," talked-→"talk" and lived-→"live" (each modified once) can also be classified as the omission of the past tense morpheme.

3. /s/--/z/ when followed by /ð/ (voiced th) (e.g., yes the -→"yez the").

4. Modification of verbs (knocked-→"knockeded"); one occasion only.

Marta's dialect-based miscues fell into the following categories:

1. De-voicing of word-final and syllable-final consonants.
   a. word-final /d/-→/t/ (e.g., feed-→"feet"); rather consistently.
   b. syllable-final /d/-→/t/ (didn't-→"ditn't" and goodness-→"gootness" both consistently) Please see numbers 2 and 3 below for other modifications of final /d/.
   c. word-final /z/-→/s/ (e.g., his-→"hiss") rather consistently.
   d. word-final /v/-→/f/ (e.g., leave-→"leaf") only one exception.

2. Omission of final consonants (stayed-→"stay," cried-→"cry" and tried-→"try"). Please see note in number 3.

3. Simplification of final consonant clusters (e.g., didn't-→"didn'"). Note: the modification of stopped-→"stop", talked-→"talk" and happened-→"happen" can also be classified as the omission of the past tense morpheme; some modifications which would fit into 1, a. and/or 2, can also be classified as such.

4. Modification of verbs (kept-→"keeped," tried-→"trieded," and fell-→"fall";(no other modifications made).

Raúl's dialect-based miscues fell into the following categories:

1. Devoicing of final consonants.
   a. final /d/→/t/ (e.g., said→"set").
   b. final /z/→/s/ (as→"ass"); only once.
   c. final /n/→/nk/ (King→"Kink").
2. Simplification of final consonant clusters (e.g., next→"necks") 26 times he did simplify final consonant clusters, but 57 times he did not. Note: the modification of walked→"walk" and tripped→"trip" (each modified once) can also be classified as the omission of the past tense morpheme.
3. Vowel change (e.g., foolish→"fullish"); seven different cases.
4. Regularization of an irregular verb (fell→"falled"); only once.
5. /s/→/z/ when followed by /ð/ (voiced th) (yes the→"yez the"); once he did it, once he did not.

Roberto's dialect-based miscues fell into the following categories:

1. De-voicing of consonants.
   a. final /d/→/t/ (e.g., old→"olt").
   b. final /z/→/s/ (e.g., his→"hiss").
   c. medial /z/→/s/ (e.g., wasn't→"wassn't").
   d. medial /g/→/k/ (e.g., legs→"leks").
   e. final /v/→/f/ (e.g., of→"uff").
2. Simplification of final consonant clusters (asked→"ask"); done only once. Note: this

modification can also be classified as omission of past tense morpheme.

3. Vowel changes (e.g., donkey→"dunkey").

While Roberto did on a number of occasions produce the above dialect-based miscues, he was not consistent in doing so. For example, while he did pronounce a final /d/ as a /t/ 21 times, there were 31 times that he pronounced it correctly (as /d/). Also, in no case was Roberto's "accent" so strong as to cause confusion to listeners.

It was found that the dialect-based miscues exhibited by each of the five students had little or no effect upon their reading comprehension.

DISCUSSION

It was initially indicated that answers were sought to three important questions concerning the subjects' oral fluency in both Spanish and English, the strategies they use in reading English, and the importance of their dialect-based miscues. The following is an attempt to offer some answers to these questions.

Q.#1. What is the relationship between the students' oral fluency in Spanish, their oral fluency in English, and their reading ability in English?

A. The BINL and RMI test results indicate the following:

1. There appears to be a high degree of correlation between the students' oral fluency in Spanish, their oral fluency in English, and their ability to read effectively in English. With one exception, all students were consistent in their levels of proficiency in the three skills listed above.
2. As seen in the BINL results, all five subjects exhibited greater oral fluency in English than in Spanish.

Q.#2. When dialect-based miscues occur, do they hamper the students' reading comprehension?

A. As indicated in the test results, all five subjects' oral readings of their RMI stories did contain a number of dialect-based miscues, but there were no instances in which it was evident that those miscues hampered their comprehension of the material. For example, although Marta read "fell" as "fall," "grew" as "grow," "happened" as "happen," and "talked" as "talk," it appears quite evident that her difficulty is not in understanding whether the story was describing events in the

past or in the present, since in the majority of the cases she read the verbs in the past tense (as written), and since she also used the past tense in her retelling of the story, with the notable exceptions of those verbs which she had also misread. The difficulty evidenced here is not a reading problem; instead, Marta's weakness is in her lack of mastery of the past tense forms of irregular verbs and of the pronunciation of final consonant clusters (which she tended to simplify also in words other than verbs).

Similarly, Dr. Barrera (1973) reported that the students in her study demonstrated that dialect-based miscues in oral reading did not, in general, affect her subjects' ability to comprehend what they read.

Q.#3. What types of reading strategies do these students use in English reading?

A. As indicated by the test results reported previously, none of the five subjects demonstrated highly effective use of reading strategies. If one general statement can be made concerning the current needs of all five students in terms of remedial reading instruction, it is the following: all five need to be taught, convinced, and frequently reminded that the purpose of reading is to make sense of the printed words; that whatever they read must make sense to them.

Following are some examples of sentences which the subjects were apparently content to leave as nonsensical utterances.

Concha

"He sawn d. . . sm. . . coming but if the ind. . . if Mrs. Mili home."

(He saw dark smoke coming out of the window of Mrs. Miller's house.)

Eduardo

"They belonged him from their troubles."

(They blamed him for their troubles.)

Marta

"They blammed him for their tru-bleez."

(They blamed him for their troubles.)

Raúl

"They belong him to their trouble."

(They blamed him for their troubles.)

Roberto

"The old man hard here wards."

(The old man heard her words.)

Nor did the students' retelling of the stories indicate that they had derived meaning from these poorly-read sentences. It is clear that none of these students

have learned to consistently demand meaning from print.

Two of the five subjects (Marta and Roberto) frequently used overly-precise articulation which is not heard in the natural speech of native speakers of American English--nor, for that matter, did Marta nor Roberto speak that way in conversation. For example, in their oral reading, the word "a" became "ā", and medial and final t's were clearly enunciated, such as in ma<u>tt</u>er and no<u>t</u>. It appears that both of these students believe that one of the most important goals of reading (orally) is to "make the right sounds". Also, Raúl quite frequently (20 percent) over-corrected his miscues; that is, he often corrected such "mistakes" as reading "didn't" for "did not". This indicated that he too, placed a great deal of importance upon the "correctness" of his oral rendition of the text.

Of the five subjects, Roberto payed the greatest amount of attention to what the words looked like; 96 percent of his miscues had high graphic similarity to the printed text, and 60 percent had high sound similarity. However, the fact that he paid relatively little attention to whether or not what he read was making sense to him is indicated by his retelling score of 21 out of 100 points.

Rather similarly, in a study conducted with four Navajo students who were immersed in ESL, Dr. DuBois (1979) found that a close look at her subjects' corrected and uncorrected miscues, in their oral reading of English, indicated that the students were much more concerned with producing grammatically acceptable English sentences than they were with making sense of what they read. To illustrate this point, DuBois offered the following two examples of uncorrected miscues wherein the miscue is a grammatically acceptable sentence, but which substantially alters the meaning of the text:

Text: "He is called Happy Joe."
Child: "He is calling Happy Joe."

Text: "Henry didn't have a pet."
Child: "Henry did have a pet."

In contrast to this, Barrera (1978) conducted a study with a group of fourteen 3rd-grade (beginning of second semester) Spanish-dominant students who entered school as non-or limited-English-speakers, who had first experienced success in Spanish reading and who had been taught specifically that reading is a "meaning-getting" process. At the time of her study, these students had only been receiving formal reading instruction in English for three to four months, but were also experiencing success in getting meaning from English print, i.e., they were employing the same "meaning-getting" strategies to

English reading that they had learned to use successfully in Spanish reading.

It is evident that the reading comprehension of all five students in the current study has suffered (to varying degrees) from a misconception of the purpose of reading, and all five should greatly improve in their use of reading strategies when they realize that the prime goal of reading is to attach meaning to the print rather than to pronounce the words precisely--or, for that matter, even correctly.

SUMMARY

This report has dealt with five immersion ESL students who (1) have by this time "lost" a great deal of their Spanish, but who are not (except for Marta and Raúl) truly proficient in oral English, and who (2) are having difficulties in English reading which seem to be largely attributable to their confusion concerning the purpose of reading.

The findings of this study support the current trend of thought in bilingual education, i.e., that children do best if they are first taught to read in their dominant language, and that these literacy skills will then transfer into second-language reading instruction when they have developed sufficient oral proficiency in their second language.

Conclusions and Recommendations

1. There is a difference between an ability to read orally (i.e., "make the right sounds") and an ability to receive meaning from print.

This is a point which cannot be over-stressed; that there is a great deal of difference between being an efficient and effective reader and being an accomplished oral reader. There should be no doubt in the readers' minds that reading is a meaning-getting process. In order to convince them of this, the teacher of reading--especially the teacher of ESL reading--must "listen past" any dialect-based miscues and seek only to ascertain the extent of the student's comprehension of the material read. Any mispronunciations, difficulty with irregular verbs, etc., should be ignored in the reading lesson (except when it is evident that the student's comprehension has been impaired). These oral language difficulties should then be dealt with in the oral ESL period.

2. When instructing ESL students in English reading skills, teachers should keep in mind that meaning is central to the reading process, and that pronunciation should not be included in the reading lesson.

Recognize that these four possibilities exist:

a. student pronounces word correctly, and does comprehend,

b. student pronounces word correctly, but does not comprehend,

c. student pronounces word incorrectly, but does comprehend, and

d. student pronounces word incorrectly, and does not comprehend.

NOTE: Possibilities b and c are crucial, but usually go undetected.

3. Whenever the students read aloud and make an error that does not make sense (e.g., "The tree was full of reap (ripe) fruit."), and do not correct themselves, ask them, "Does that make sense to you?" and/or "Does that sound right to you?"

4. When assigning silent reading selections, remind the students that they should be continually asking themselves the above questions as they read, and that if what they read does cease to make sense to them, they must do something about it, such as the following:

a. re-read the amount necessary to pinpoint the troublesome word(s) or phrase(s) and use context clues to ascertain its (their) meaning.

b. If a. doesn't work, advise them to skip it for the time being and seek additional clues in the succeeding text.

c. This failing--and providing that the meaning of the troublesome word(s) or phrase(s) is crucial--they can use word attack skills, ask for help, look it up in the dictionary.

5. A variety of exercises should be used to help the students learn the great value of context clues and to become more skilled in making use of them.

It is hoped that if these guidelines are followed from the very beginning of any ESL student's exposure to English reading, there will be far more swimmers and fewer--if any--of those who sink.

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